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Foreign Policy Association

NATIONAL OPINION BALLOT REPORT

October 1, 1991

OPINION SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS:

NATIONALISM'S REVIVAL IN THE SOVIET REPUBLICS

- FPA Great Decisions readers prefer Gorbachev to Yeltsin to lead the Soviet Union toward democracy and a free-market economy. 66% of the 5,000 person sample said Gorbachev rather than Yeltsin deserved American support. (Opinion samples were submitted prior to the August coup attempt.)
- 32% of the FPA sample preferred Yeltsin to Gorbachev.
- A small fraction of the sample could not decide which person should lead.

THE NEW EUROPE

- As the United States considers its position on free trade, the evolution of the NATO defense alliance and new alignments between Eastern and Western Europe, several thousand FPA Great Decisions readers signaled their view — by a 58% to 40% majority -- that Washington should encourage the phasing out of NATO, leaving the Europeans to take care of their own defense. The alternative was to expand NATO's role.
- On trade, FPA participants by an overwhelming margin — 89% to 9% — saw a single European market as an opportunity for the U.S. rather than a threat.

MEDIA'S ROLE IN FOREIGN POLICY

- Among sources for international news coverage, the MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour was found to be the *least biased* by a factor of two to one. CNN also rated well in this category.

OTHER TOPICS:

- Middle East
- Japanese-U.S. Trade
- Foreign Aid
- Women, Population and Environment
- Cuba

This **Ballot Report** *gives the results tabulated from 35,677 ballots in the Foreign Policy Association's annual nationwide opinion ballot survey on "Great Decisions" in foreign policy. The background of participants differs greatly from the general population. Three quarters of the participants are college graduates, with many also holding advanced degrees. Over half are asked their opinions on foreign policy matters sometimes or often. The states submitting the largest number of ballots were, in this order, California, Oregon, Florida, Virginia, Illinois, Colorado and New York.*

***Great Decisions,** a 96-page briefing book on eight critical foreign policy issues, is published annually by the nonpartisan Foreign Policy Association. This is the 37th year of the nationwide Great Decisions study program.*

Topic 1

The Middle East

By a wide margin, respondents to the Great Decisions preliminary opinion ballot survey on U.S. interests in the Middle East opposed the U.S. maintaining a long-term military presence in the region. An overwhelming majority favored the formation of a regional security organization instead. These opinions emerged from responses received between mid-January and late March. The results were released on April 8.

The United Nations was held in high esteem by most respondents. Many spontaneously expressed the desire for a stronger role for the UN in the Middle East. "A United Nations force with teeth should preserve the peace," one said. Even some of those who favored a long-term U.S. military presence in the region appeared to do so more with a sense of resignation than enthusiasm: "too late now to soft-pedal or pull out."

Foremost on the list of problems to be solved in the minds of Great Decisions participants was the Palestinian question. Nearly nine of ten respondents wanted the U.S. to put pressure on Israel to come to an accommodation with the Palestinians while also strengthening U.S. ties with moderate Arab states. Interestingly, a slight majority also felt U.S. ties to Israel were strong enough and did not need strengthening.

Opposition to arms sales was expressed among the respondents. A majority opposed supplying arms even to those Middle Eastern countries that promoted pluralism and respect for human rights.

A decade after the year-long hostage trauma in Iran, all but a few respondents supported normalization of U.S. relations with Iran.

Issue B.* To serve its long-term interests in the Middle East, the U.S. should:

	Yes	No
Be prepared to maintain a long-term military presence in the region.	31%	69%
Encourage formation of a regional security organization.	94%	6%
Leave responsibility for Gulf security to nations in the region.	61%**	40%
Normalize relations with Iran.	82%	18%
Strengthen ties to Israel.	47%	53%
Put pressure on Israel to come to an accomodation with the Palestinians, strengthening U.S. ties with moderate Arab states.	88%	12%
Supply arms to Middle East countries only if they promote pluralism and respect for human rights.	44%	57%

*Note: Issue A, "What do you think would be a valid reason for an attack on Iraq?" was superseded by events.

** These and all other percentages reported below do not add up to 100 because of rounding and/or missing responses.

Topic 2

The New Europe

With the Soviet Union in retreat from Eastern Europe and on its way toward democratic reform at home, National Opinion Ballot participants pondered some of the implications of those changes for the West. For example, had the time not come to phase out NATO and let Europe take care of its own defense? Or would the U.S. still be well served by that institution, albeit with an expanded political and strategic role? By a 3-2 margin, participants opted for phasing out NATO rather than seeing its role revised. But it was not an unqualified verdict. One participant modified the preference for phasing out NATO by stipulating that "it should be gradual and with care so long as the Soviet situation is iffy."

In contrast to NATO, the question of Europe in 1992 provoked little equivocation. Opinion was almost unanimous that the single European market planned for 1992 would be an opportunity rather than a threat for America's economy. Few expressed alarm that the single market might lead to trading blocs or trade wars. But majority opinion came with some reservations, like the one that "U.S.-European trade be fair to the U.S."

Issue A. What position should the U.S. take with regard to the military security of the new Europe?

Washington should promote the expansion of NATO's political and strategic role	40%
Washington should encourage the phasing out of NATO, leaving the Europeans to take care of their own defense through CSCE or some other institution	58%

Note: In this tabulation and below, the percentage of other responses volunteered by participants is not shown.

Issue B. How should the U.S. react to the creation of a single European market by the end of 1992?

The U.S. should view a single European market with alarm	

because it will lead to trading blocs and potential trade wars	9%
The U.S. should view a single European market as an opportunity to expand American trade and investments	89%

Topic 3

Nationalism's Revival in the Soviet Republics

As Boris Yeltsin rose to become the most popular champion of democratic reform in the Soviet Union, having won the first direct election as Russia's president, governments in the West faced the dilemma of which one to support more strongly: Mikhail Gorbachev — who overcame a coup attempt after the participants had sent in their ballots — or Boris Yeltsin. By a wide margin, Great Decisions participants favored giving the nod to Gorbachev.

Participants expressed little enthusiasm for increasing U.S. assistance to East European countries during their transition to free-market economies. A plurality was content with maintaining the present level of assistance. Barely one in three favored increased assistance, and even then the choice was often qualified by such comments as "but not direct dollar aid." The greater assistance some envisioned would be more in the form of "cultural and educational exchanges" or "technological expertise." One quarter of the participants opted to let others provide assistance, some naming international organizations and others the West European countries.

Issue A. To ensure that the Soviet Union moves toward democracy and a free-market economy with a minimum of ethnic bloodshed, whom should the U.S. support more strongly?

Soviet President Mikhail S. Gorbachev	66%
Leaders of the republics, like Boris N. Yeltsin, president of the Russian Republic	32%

Issue B. With regard to helping East European countries during their transition to free-market economies, the U.S. should:

Maintain present assistance level	43%
Increase assistance	29%
Let others provide assistance	24%

Topic 4

Foreign Aid

As with the question of aid for Eastern Europe, the general question of development aid evoked little enthusiasm among participants. None of the three options offered received majority support. Just four in ten came out in favor of maintaining the present level, though with little praise for existing programs. While only one in ten opted to suspend development aid altogether, some of them appended their choice with forceful comments. "Give humanitarian aid only," was the cry of several participants not happy with the response alternatives on this issue.

The question of how best to distribute U.S. aid elicited considerable esteem for international organizations among participants. Four times as many wanted *all* development aid to be channeled through international organizations as wanted no such aid to be handled this way.

Roughly the same number of participants favored maintaining the present level of U.S. security aid as was true for the question of development aid (four in ten). But almost three in ten wanted security aid to be suspended, and many who did not go that far volunteered the opinion that such aid be decreased. Only a handful favored an increase.

Issue A. Regarding development aid, the U.S. should:

Maintain present aid level	44%
Increase aid	21%
Suspend aid	10%

Issue B. Concerning the distribution of development aid, the U.S. should:

Channel all such aid through international organizations	43%
Channel no such aid through international organizations	10%
Maintain present distribution of such aid	31%

Issue C. Regarding security aid, the U.S. should:

Maintain present aid level	39%
Increase aid	4%
Suspend aid	28%

Issue C. How much does media coverage influence your opinions about international affairs?

A great deal	21%
Quite a bit	39%
Somewhat	31%
Very little	8%
Not at all	1%

Characteristics of Participants

All in all, 35,677 ballots were tabulated in this year's program (not including those tabulated for the preliminary survey on Topic 1, The Middle East). On the average, close to five thousand participants sent in ballots for a given topic. More than half of them had participated in previous programs. The background of participants differs considerably from the general population. Women outnumber men by a 3 to 2 margin. The majority is over 60 years of age. The states with the largest numbers of participants are (in that order): California, Oregon, Florida, Virginia, Illinois, Colorado, New York, Ohio, Washington, Maryland and Arizona. Three of every four participants are college graduates, with many also holding advanced degrees. Over half indicated that they were asked about their opinions on foreign policy matters at least sometimes. Also more than half reported they had been abroad during the last four years.

A. How many years have you participated in the Great Decisions program (that is, attended one or more discussion sessions)?

This is the first year that I have participated	29%
I participated in one previous year	14%
I participated in more than one previous year	57%

B. Sex

Female	64%
Male	36%

C. Have you been abroad during the last four years?

Yes	57%
No	44%

D. Highest level of formal education

Some high school	4%
High school degree	6%
Some college	15%
College graduate	39%
Advanced degree	36%

E. How often are you asked for your opinion on foreign policy matters?

Often	17%
Sometimes	54%
Hardly ever	30%

F. Would you say that you have or have not changed your opinion in a fairly significant way as a result of taking part in the Great Decisions program?

Have changed	44%
Have not changed	31%
Uncertain	26%

The NATIONAL OPINION BALLOT REPORT was prepared by Helmut Norpoth, professor of political science at the State University of New York at Stony Brook and a former consultant to The New York Times/CBS News Poll.

GREAT DECISIONS 1992

250,000 Americans participate in the Foreign Policy Association's "Great Decisions" study program each year. To take part, send $13.50 for a copy of ***Great Decisions 1992*** ($11.00 plus $2.50 for postage and handling — available in January) to:

Foreign Policy Association
729 Seventh Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10019
212-764-4050
800-628-5754

The *Great Decisions* briefing book is available as part of a special program in Georgia and New Jersey. For more information, call 212-764-4050.

Topic 5

Japanese-U.S. Trade

Opinion on U.S. trade policy toward Japan showed a remarkable degree of unanimity. All but a few participants favored a policy of negotiating reciprocal trade agreements with Japan in specific industries. At the same time, a similar percentage urged the U.S. to continue the pressure on Japan to open its domestic market. In contrast, protectionist measures like imposing high tariffs and quotas on Japanese goods were rejected by an overwhelming margin.

Issue A. Regarding trade with Japan, the U.S. should or should not:

	Yes	No
Continue to press Japan to open its domestic market	91%	9%
Impose high tariffs and quotas on Japanese goods	16%	84%
Negotiate reciprocal trade agreements with Japan in specific industries	95%	5%

Topic 6

Women, Population and Environment

Whatever the true causes of global warming, almost all Great Decisions participants urged the U.S. government to see to it that CO_2 emissions be cut in a specific time frame. At the same time, without much dissent they also favored more incentives for U.S. industry to use environmentally safe technology. It would seem that both measures enjoy broad support in their own right, regardless of whether they effectively counter global warming. In fact, more participants supported than opposed continuation of the "no regrets" policy that includes doing more research. In comments on this issue, many participants proposed heavier reliance on conservation and solar power, or advocated raising the gasoline tax by 50 cents.

The twin issues of population control and abortion did not prove very controversial among Great Decisions participants. By overwhelming margins, they urged the Federal government to reverse steps taken by the Reagan Administration and restore full funding for both the UN Population Fund and the International Planned Parenthood Federation. Participants voiced widespread opposition to current government policy of channeling aid to programs that reject abortion services. More than eight in ten also rebuked the U.S. for pressuring the two organizations to curtail abortions.

Another proposal enjoying sweeping support concerned the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. All but a handful advocated quick ratification by the U.S., feeling that the "U.S. should be a leader in such efforts — not lag behind." One third, nonetheless, favored ratification only with conditions.

Issue A. What actions should the U.S. government take to counter global warming?

	Yes	No
Continue the "no regrets" policy of implementing beneficial measures while doing more research	56%	44%
Take steps to lower significantly carbon dioxide emissions in the U.S. in a specific time frame	95%	5%
Increase incentives to U.S. industry to use environmentally safe technology	97%	3%

Issue B. What position should the U.S. take regarding funding for the UN Population Fund and the International Planned Parenthood Federation?

	Yes	No
Restore full funding to both organizations	87%	13%
Continue the current policy of channeling aid to programs that reject abortion services	18%	82%
Increase pressure on the two organizations to abandon programs that provide abortions	17%	83%

Issue C. What action should the U.S. take concerning the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women?

	Yes	No
Move rapidly to ratify the convention	89%	11%
Ratify the convention with conditions	34%	66%
Refrain from ratifying the convention	10%	90%

Topic 7

Cuba

Participants expressed little faith that present American policy toward Cuba was helpful in promoting democracy in that country. While opinion was divided, the largest proportion, roughly one third, favored lifting the embargo and restoring diplomatic relations with Cuba. One quarter of the participants put their stock in negotiation with Castro as a means to promote democracy in Cuba, especially "now that the U.S.S.R.'s relationship with Cuba no longer makes it threatening." On the other hand, another quarter of participants favored putting more pressure on Castro.

Issue A. In what way can the U.S. best promote democracy in Cuba?

Continue present policy	15%
Increase pressure on Castro to implement such reforms as holding free elections and respecting human rights	23%
Start negotiations with Castro	28%
Lift the embargo and restore diplomatic relations	35%

Topic 8

Media's Role in Foreign Policy

Great Decisions participants, as might be expected, are avid followers of international affairs in the news media, but no single medium seems to monopolize their attention. Newspapers and the MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour wound up in a dead heat for first place in the "great deal" of attention paid column, with 36 percent each, closely trailed by network TV with 30 percent. CNN, however, was not far behind, with a share of 26 percent, edging out magazines (21%) and radio (17%). Both newspapers and network TV, however, could also count on substantial shares in the "quite a bit" column, more so than the other sources. As a result, it would be fairer to rank newspapers as the premier source of information for participants, followed by network TV and the MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour.

Participants also were asked to rate the various media for bias in their coverage of international affairs. Rated as the least biased source was the MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour: almost half of the participants saw "no bias" in its coverage, and barely one in ten faulted it for "strong bias." For network TV, the balance was almost the reverse: three of ten seeing strong bias here, and just one in twenty detecting no bias. CNN also fared quite well on bias, while newspapers and magazines were judged to be considerably more biased.

Participants, in large numbers, credited media coverage with influencing their opinions about international affairs. Over half of them attributed a great deal or quite a bit of influence to media coverage. While it is true that few participants could have obtained information about international matters from personal experience, it is surprising nonetheless that so many of them see their opinions as being shaped by the media. To put this finding in some perspective, note the ballot outcome on the question of whether or not taking part in the Great Decisions program changed your opinion in a fairly significant way: by a 4 to 3 margin participants indicated that it did change their opinion. (See item F of the Characteristics section below)

Issue A. How much attention do you pay to the coverage of international affairs by the following?

	A great deal	Quite a bit	Some	Very little	None
Radio	17%	22%	31%	21%	9%
Network TV (ABC, CBS, NBC)	30%	36%	23%	9%	2%
CNN	26%	26%	19%	9%	20%
MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour	36%	21%	17%	11%	14%
Newspapers	36%	34%	22%	7%	1%
Magazines	21%	28%	31%	16%	5%

Issue B. In your opinion, does the coverage of international affairs by the following show a strong bias, some bias or no bias at all?

	Strong Bias	Some Bias	No Bias
Radio	9%	77%	14%
Network TV (ABC, CBS, NBC)	30%	65%	6%
CNN	12%	66%	22%
MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour	7%	48%	45%
Newspapers	26%	70%	4%
Magazines	24%	72%	5%